

Meditations for the Month of May



by Blessed John Henry Newman

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May, The Month of Promise

Why is May chosen as the month in which we exercise a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin?

The first reason is because it is the time when the earth bursts forth into its fresh foliage and its green grass after the stern frost and snow of winter, and the raw atmosphere and the wild wind and rain of the early spring. It is because the blossoms are upon the trees and the flowers are in the gardens. It is because the days have got long, and the sun rises early and sets late. For such gladness and joyousness of external Nature is a fit attendant on our devotion to her who is the Mystical Rose and the House of Gold.



A man may say, "True; but in this climate we have sometimes a bleak, inclement May." This cannot be denied; but still, so much is true that at least it is the month of *promise* and of *hope*. Even though the weather happen to be bad, it is the month that *begins* and heralds in the summer. We know, for all that may be unpleasant in it, that fine weather is coming, sooner or later. "Brightness and beauty shall," in the Prophet's words, "appear at the end, and shall not lie: if it make delay, wait for it, for it shall surely come, and shall not be slack."

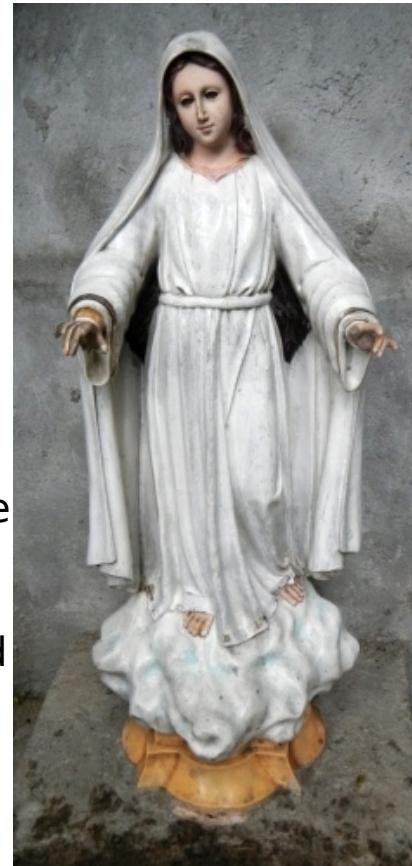
May then is the month, if not of fulfillment, at least of *promise*; and is not this the very aspect in which we most suitably regard the Blessed Virgin, Holy Mary, to whom this month is dedicated?

The Prophet says, "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise out of his root." Who is the flower but our Blessed Lord? Who is the rod, or beautiful stalk or stem or plant out of which the flower grows, but Mary, Mother of our Lord, Mary, Mother of God?

It was prophesied that God should come upon earth. When the time was now full, how was it announced? It was announced by the Angel coming to Mary. "Hail, full of grace," said Gabriel, "the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." She then was the sure *promise* of the coming Saviour, and therefore May is by a special title her month.

May, The Month of Joy

Why is May called the month of Mary, and especially dedicated to her? Among other reasons there is this, that of the Church's year, the ecclesiastical year, it is at once the most sacred and the most festive and joyous portion. Who would wish February, March, or April, to be the month of Mary, considering that it is the time of Lent and penance? Who again would choose December, the Advent season - a time of hope, indeed, because Christmas is coming, but a time of fasting too? Christmas itself does not last for a month; and January has indeed the joyful Epiphany, with its Sundays in succession; but these in most years are cut short by the urgent coming of Septuagesima.



May on the contrary belongs to the Easter season, which lasts fifty days, and in that season the whole of May commonly falls, and the first half always. The great Feast of the Ascension of our Lord into heaven is always in May, except once or twice in forty years. Pentecost, called also Whit-Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Ghost, is commonly in May, and the Feasts of the Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi are in May not unfrequently. May, therefore, is the time in which there are such frequent Alleluias, because Christ has risen from the grave, Christ has ascended on high, and God the Holy Ghost has come down to take His place.

Here then we have a reason why May is dedicated to the Blessed Mary. She is the first of creatures, the most acceptable child of God, the dearest and nearest to Him. It is fitting then that this month should be hers, in which we especially glory and rejoice in His great Providence to us, in our redemption and sanctification in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

But Mary is not only the acceptable handmaid of the Lord. She is also Mother of His Son, and the Queen of all Saints, and in this month the Church has placed the feasts of some of the greatest of them, as if to bear her company. First, however, there is the Feast of the Holy Cross, on the 3rd of May, when we venerate that Precious Blood in which the Cross was bedewed at the time of our Lord's Passion. The Archangel Saint Michael, and three Apostles, have feast-days in this month: Saint John, the beloved disciple, Saint Philip, and Saint James. Seven Popes, two of them especially famous, Saint Gregory VII and Saint Pius V; also two of the greatest Doctors, Saint Athanasius and Saint Gregory Nazianzen; two holy Virgins especially favoured by God, Saint Catherine of Sienna (as her feast is kept in England), and Saint Mary Magdalen of Pazzi; and one holy woman most memorable in the annals of the Church, Saint Monica, the Mother of Saint Augustine. And above all, and nearest to us in this Church, our own holy Patron and Father, Saint Philip, occupies, with his Novena and Octave, fifteen out of the whole thirty-one days of the month. These are some of the choicest fruits of God's manifold grace, and they form the court of their glorious Queen.

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "Virgo Purissima", The Most Pure Virgin

By the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin is meant the great revealed truth that she was conceived in the womb of her mother, Saint Anne, without original sin.

Since the fall of Adam all mankind, his descendants, are conceived and born in sin. "Behold," says the inspired writer in the *Psalm Miserere* - "Behold, I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." That sin which belongs to every one of us, and is ours from the first moment of our existence, is the sin of unbelief and disobedience, by which Adam lost Paradise. We, as the children of Adam, are heirs to the consequences of his sin, and have forfeited in him that spiritual robe of grace and holiness which he had given him by his Creator at the time that he was made. In this state of forfeiture and disinheritance we are all of us conceived and born; and the ordinary way by which we are taken out of it is the Sacrament of Baptism.

But Mary *never* was in this state; she was by the eternal decree of God exempted from it. From eternity, God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, decreed to create the race of man, and, foreseeing the fall of Adam, decreed to redeem the whole race by the Son's taking flesh and suffering on the Cross. In that same incomprehensible, eternal instant, in which the Son of God was born of the Father, was also the



decree passed of man's redemption through Him. He who was born from Eternity was born by an eternal decree to save us in Time, and to redeem the whole race; and Mary's redemption was determined in that special manner which we call the Immaculate Conception. It was decreed, not that she should be *cleansed* from sin, but that she should, from the first moment of her being, be *preserved* from sin; so that the Evil One never had any part in her. Therefore she was a child of Adam and Eve as if they had never fallen; she did not share with them their sin; she inherited the gifts and graces (and more than those) which Adam and Eve possessed in Paradise. This is her prerogative, and the foundation of all those salutary truths which are revealed to us concerning her. Let us say then with all holy souls, *Virgin most pure, conceived without original sin, Mary, pray for us.*

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "Virgo Praedicanda", The Virgin Who Is To Be Proclaimed

Mary is the *Virgo Praedicanda*, that is, the Virgin who is to be proclaimed, to be heralded, literally, to be *preached*.

We are accustomed to preach abroad that which is wonderful, strange, rare, novel, important. Thus, when our Lord was coming, Saint John the Baptist *preached* Him; then, the Apostles went into the wide world, and *preached* Christ. What is the highest, the rarest, the choicest prerogative of Mary? It is that she was without sin. When a woman in the crowd cried out to our Lord, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee! " He answered, "More blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." Those words were fulfilled in Mary. She was filled with grace *in order* to be the Mother of God. But it was a higher gift than her maternity to be thus sanctified and thus pure. Our Lord indeed would not have become her son *unless* He had first sanctified her; but still, the greater blessedness was to have that perfect sanctification. *This* then is why she is the *Virgo Praedicanda*; she is deserving to be preached abroad because she never committed any sin, even the least; because sin had no part in her; because, through the fullness of God's grace, she never thought a thought, or spoke a word, or did an action, which was displeasing, which was not most pleasing, to Almighty God; because in her was displayed the greatest triumph over the enemy of souls. Wherefore, when all seemed lost, in order to show what He could do for us all by



dying for us; in order to show what human nature, His work, was capable of becoming; to show how utterly He could bring to naught the utmost efforts, the most concentrated malice of the foe, and reverse all the consequences of the Fall, our Lord began, even before His coming, to do His most wonderful act of redemption, in the person of her who was to be His Mother. By the merit of that Blood which was to be shed, He interposed to hinder her incurring the sin of Adam, before He had made on the Cross atonement for it. And therefore it is that we *preach* her who is the subject of this wonderful grace.

But she was the *Virgo Praedicanda* for another reason. When, why, what things do we preach? We preach what is not known, that it may become known. And hence the Apostles are said in Scripture to "preach Christ." To whom? To those who knew Him not - to the heathen world. Not to those who knew Him, but to those who did not know Him. Preaching is a gradual work: first one lesson, then another. Thus were the heathen brought into the Church *gradually*. And in like manner, the preaching of Mary to the children of the Church, and the devotion paid to her by them, has *grown*, grown gradually, with successive ages. Not so much preached about her in *early* times as in *later*. First she was preached as the Virgin of Virgins - then as the Mother of God - then as glorious in her Assumption - then as the Advocate of sinners - then as Immaculate in her Conception. And this last has been the special preaching of the present century; and thus that which was earliest in her own history is the latest in the Church's recognition of her.

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "*Mater Admirabilis*", The Wonderful Mother

When Mary, the *Virgo Praedicanda*, the Virgin who is to be proclaimed aloud, is called by the title of *Admirabilis*, it is thereby suggested to us what the effect is of the preaching of her as Immaculate in her Conception. The Holy Church proclaims, preaches her, as conceived without original sin; and those who hear, the children of Holy Church, wonder, marvel, are astonished and overcome by the preaching. It is so great a prerogative.

Even created excellence is fearful to think of when it is so high as Mary's. As to the great *Creator*, when Moses desired to see His glory, He Himself says about Himself, "Thou canst not see My face, for man shall not see Me and live;" and Saint Paul says, "Our God is a consuming fire." And when Saint John, holy as he was, saw only the *Human Nature* of our Lord, as He is in Heaven, "he fell at His feet as dead." And so as regards the appearance of angels. The holy Daniel, when Saint Gabriel appeared to him, "fainted away, and lay in a consternation, with his face close to the ground." When this great archangel came to Zacharias, the father of Saint John the Baptist, he too "was troubled, and fear fell upon him." But it was otherwise with Mary when the same Saint Gabriel came to her. She was overcome indeed, and troubled at his *words*, because, humble as she was in her own opinion of herself, he



addressed her as "Full of grace," and "Blessed among women;" but she was able to bear the sight of him.

Hence we learn two things: first, how great a holiness was Mary's, seeing she could endure the presence of an angel, whose brightness smote the holy prophet Daniel even to fainting and almost to death; and secondly, since she is so much holier than that angel, and we so much less holy than Daniel, what great reason we have to call her the *Virgo Admirabilis*, the Wonderful, the Awful Virgin, when we think of her ineffable purity!

There are those who are so thoughtless, so blind, so grovelling as to think that Mary is not as much shocked at willful sin as her Divine Son is, and that we can make her our friend and advocate, though we go to her without contrition at heart, without even the wish for true repentance and resolution to amend. As if Mary could hate sin less, and love sinners more, than our Lord does! No: she feels a sympathy for those only who wish to *leave* their sins; else, how should she be without sin herself? No: if even to the best of us she is, in the words of Scripture, "fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and *terrible as an army set in array*," what is she to the impenitent sinner?

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "*Domus Aurea*", The House of Gold

Why is she called a House? And why is she called Golden? Gold is the most beautiful, the most valuable, of all metals. Silver, copper, and steel may in their way be made good to the eye, but nothing is so rich, so splendid, as gold. We have few opportunities of seeing it in any quantity; but anyone who has seen a large number of bright gold coins knows how magnificent is the look of gold. Hence it is that in Scripture the Holy City is, by a figure of speech, called Golden. "The City," says Saint John, "was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." He means of course to give us a notion of the wondrous beauty of heaven, by comparing it with what is the most beautiful of all the substances which we see on earth.

Therefore it is that Mary too is called golden; because her graces, her virtues, her innocence, her purity, are of that transcendent brilliancy and dazzling perfection, so costly, so exquisite, that the angels cannot, so to say, keep their eyes off her any more than we could help gazing upon any great work of gold.

But observe further, she is a golden house, or, I will rather say, a golden palace. Let us imagine we saw a whole palace or large church all made of gold, from the foundations to the



roof; such, in regard to the number, the variety, the extent of her spiritual excellences, is Mary.

But why called a house or palace? And whose palace? She is the house and the palace of the Great King, of God Himself. Our Lord, the Co-equal Son of God, once dwelt in her. He was her Guest; nay, more than a guest, for a guest comes into a house as well as leaves it. But our Lord was actually born in this holy house. He took His flesh and His blood from this house, from the flesh, from the veins of Mary. Rightly then was she made to be of pure gold, because she was to give of that gold to form the body of the Son of God. She was golden in her conception, golden in her birth. She went through the fire of her suffering like gold in the furnace, and when she ascended on high, she was, in the words of our hymn,

Above all the Angels in glory untold,
Standing next to the King in a vesture of gold.

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "*Mater Amabilis*", the Lovable or Dear Mother

Why is she "Amabilis" thus specially? It is because she was without sin. Sin is something odious in its very nature, and grace is something bright, beautiful, attractive.

However, it may be said that sinlessness was not enough to make others love her, or to make her dear to others, and that for two reasons: first, because we cannot like anyone that is not like ourselves, and we are sinners; and next, because her being holy would not make her pleasant and winning, because holy persons whom we fall in with, are not always agreeable, and we cannot like them, however we may revere them and look up to them.

Now as to the first of these two questions, we may grant that bad men do not, cannot like good men; but our Blessed Virgin Mary is called *Amabilis*, or lovable, as being such to the children of the Church, not to those outside of it, who know nothing about her; and no child of Holy Church but has some remains of God's grace in his soul which makes him sufficiently like her, however greatly wanting he may be, to allow of his being able to love her. So we may let this question pass.

But as to the second question, viz., How are we sure that our Lady, when she was on earth, attracted people round her, and made them love her merely because she was holy? -



considering that holy people sometimes have not that gift of drawing others to them.

To explain this point we must recollect that there is a vast difference between the state of a soul such as that of the Blessed Virgin, which has never sinned, and a soul, however holy, which has once had upon it Adam's sin; for, even after baptism and repentance, it suffers necessarily from the spiritual wounds which are the consequence of that sin. Holy men, indeed, never commit mortal sin; nay, sometimes have never committed even one mortal sin in the whole course of their lives. But Mary's holiness went beyond this. She never committed even a venial sin, and this special privilege is not known to belong to anyone but Mary.

Now, whatever want of amiableness, sweetness, attractiveness, really exists in holy men arises from the remains of sin in them, or again from the want of a holiness powerful enough to overcome the defects of nature, whether of soul or body; but, as to Mary, her holiness was such, that if we saw her, and heard her, we should not be able to tell to those who asked us anything about her except simply that she was angelic and heavenly.

Of course her face was most beautiful; but we should not be able to recollect whether it was beautiful or not; we should not recollect any of her features, because it was her beautiful sinless soul, which looked through her eyes, and spoke through her mouth, and was heard in her voice, and compassed her all about; when she was still, or when she walked, whether she smiled, or was sad, her sinless soul, this it was which would draw all those to her who had any grace in them, any remains of grace, any love of holy things. There was a divine music in all she said and did - in her mien, her air, her deportment, that charmed every true heart that came near her. Her innocence, her humility and modesty,

her simplicity, sincerity, and truthfulness, her unselfishness, her unaffected interest in everyone who came to her, her purity - it was these qualities which made her so lovable; and were we to see her now, neither our first thought nor our second thought would be, what she could do for us with her Son (though she can do so much), but our first thought would be, "Oh, how beautiful! " and our second thought would be, "Oh, what ugly hateful creatures are we!"

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "*Rosa Mystica*", the Mystical Rose

How did Mary become the *Rosa Mystica*, the choice, delicate, perfect flower of God's spiritual creation? It was by being born, nurtured and sheltered in the mystical garden or Paradise of God. Scripture makes use of the figure of a garden, when it would speak of heaven and its blessed inhabitants. A garden is a spot of ground set apart for trees and plants, all good, all various, for things that are sweet to the taste or fragrant in scent, or beautiful to look upon, or useful for nourishment; and accordingly in its spiritual sense it means the home of blessed spirits and holy souls dwelling there together, souls with both the flowers and the fruits upon them, which by the careful husbandry of God they have come to bear, flowers and fruits of grace, flowers more beautiful and more fragrant than those of any garden, fruits more delicious and exquisite than can be matured by earthly husbandman.



All that God has made speaks of its Maker; the mountains speak of His eternity; the sun of His immensity, and the winds of His Almighty. In like manner flowers and fruits speak of His sanctity, His love, and His providence; and such as are flowers and fruits, such must be the place where they are found. That is to say, since they are found in a garden, therefore a garden has also excellences which speak of God, because it is their home. For instance, it would be out of

place if we found beautiful flowers on the mountain-crag, or rich fruit in the sandy desert. As then by flowers and fruits are meant, in a mystical sense, the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, so by a garden is meant mystically a place of spiritual repose, stillness, peace, refreshment, and delight.

Thus our first parents were placed in "a garden of pleasure" shaded by trees, "fair to behold and pleasant to eat of," with the Tree of Life in the midst, and a river to water the ground. Thus our Lord, speaking from the cross to the penitent robber, calls the blessed place, the heaven to which He was taking him, "paradise", or a garden of pleasure. Therefore Saint John, in the Apocalypse, speaks of heaven, the palace of God, as a garden or paradise, in which was the Tree of Life giving forth its fruits every month.

Such was the garden in which the Mystical Rose, the Immaculate Mary, was sheltered and nursed to be the Mother of the All Holy God, from her birth to her espousals to Saint Joseph, a term of thirteen years. For three years of it she was in the arms of her holy mother, Saint Anne, and then for ten years she lived in the temple of God. In those blessed gardens, as they may be called, she lived by herself, continually visited by the dew of God's grace, and growing up a more and more heavenly flower, till at the end of that period she was meet for the inhabitation in her of the Most Holy. This was the outcome of the Immaculate Conception. Excepting her, the fairest rose in the paradise of God has had upon it blight, and has had the risk of canker-worm and locust. All but Mary; she from the first was perfect in her sweetness and her beauty, and at length when the angel Gabriel had to come to her, he found her "full of grace," which had, from her good use of it, accumulated in her from the first moment of her being.

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is the "Virgo Veneranda", the All-Worshipful Virgin

We use the word "Venerable" generally of what is old. That is because only what is old has commonly those qualities which excite reverence or veneration.

It is a great history, a great character, a maturity of virtue, goodness, experience, that excite our reverence, and these commonly cannot belong to the young.

But this is not true when we are considering Saints. A short life with them is a long one. Thus Holy Scripture says, "Venerable age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years, but it is the understanding of a man that is gray hairs, and a spotless life is old age. The just man, if he be cut short by death, shall be at rest; being made perfect in a short time, he fulfilled a long time."

Nay, there is a heathen writer, who knew nothing of Saints, who lays it down that even to children, to all children, a great reverence should be paid, and that on the ground of their being as yet innocent. And this is a feeling very widely felt and expressed in all countries; so much so that the sight of those who have not sinned (that is, who are not yet old enough to have fallen into mortal sin) has, on the very score of that innocent, smiling youthfulness, often disturbed and turned the plunderer or the assassin in the midst of his



guilty doings, filled him with a sudden fear, and brought him, if not to repentance, at least to change of purpose.

And, to pass from the thought of the lowest to the Highest, what shall we say of the Eternal God (if we may safely speak of Him at all) but that He, because He is eternal, is ever young, without a beginning, and therefore without change, and, in the fulness and perfection of His incomprehensible attributes, now just what He was a million years ago? He is truly called in Scripture the "Ancient of Days," and is therefore infinitely venerable; yet He needs not old age to make him venerable; He has really nothing of those human attendants on venerableness which the sacred writers are obliged figuratively to ascribe to Him, in order to make us feel that profound abasement and reverential awe which we ought to entertain at the thought of Him.

And so of the great Mother of God, as far as a creature can be like the Creator; her ineffable purity and utter freedom from any shadow of sin, her Immaculate Conception, her ever-virginity - these her prerogatives (in spite of her extreme youth at the time when Gabriel came to her) are such as to lead us to exclaim in the prophetic words of Scripture both with awe and with exultation, "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem and the joy of Israel; thou art the honour of our people; therefore hath the hand of the Lord strengthened thee, and therefore art thou blessed forever."

On the Immaculate Conception - Mary is "*Sancta Maria*", the Holy Mary

God alone can claim the attribute of holiness. Hence we say in the Hymn, "Tu solus sanctus," "Thou only art holy." By holiness we mean the absence of whatever sullies, dims, and degrades a rational nature; all that is most opposite and contrary to sin and guilt.

We say that God alone is holy, though in truth all His high attributes are possessed by Him in that fulness, that it may be truly said that He alone has them. Thus, as to goodness, our Lord said to the young man, "None is good but God alone." He too alone is Power, He alone is Wisdom, He alone is Providence, Love, Mercy, Justice, Truth. This is true; but holiness is singled out as His special prerogative, because it marks more than His other attributes, not only His superiority over all His creatures, but emphatically His separation from them. Hence we read in the Book of Job, "Can man be justified compared with God, or he that is born of a woman appear clean? Behold, even the moon doth not shine, and the stars are not pure, in His sight." "Behold, among His saints none is unchangeable, and the Heavens are not pure in His sight."



This we must receive and understand in the first place; but secondly we know too, that, in His mercy, He has communicated in various measures His great attributes to His rational creatures, and, first of all, as being most necessary, holiness. Thus Adam, from the time of his

creation, was gifted, over and above his nature as man, with the grace of God, to unite him to God, and to make him holy. Grace is therefore called holy grace; and, as being holy, it is the connecting principle between God and man. Adam in Paradise might have had knowledge, and skill, and many virtues; but these gifts did not unite him to his Creator. It was holiness that united him, for it is said by Saint Paul, "Without holiness no man shall see God."

And so again, when man fell and lost their holy grace, he had various gifts still adhering to him; he might be, in a certain measure, true, merciful, loving, and just; but these virtues did not unite him to God. What he needed was holiness; and therefore the first act of God's goodness to us in the Gospel is to take us out of our unholy state by means of the sacrament of Baptism, and by the grace then given us to re-open the communications, so long closed, between the soul and heaven.

We see then the force of our Lady's title, when we call her "Holy Mary." When God would prepare a human mother for His Son, this was why He began by giving her an immaculate conception. He began, not by giving her the gift of love, or truthfulness, or gentleness, or devotion, though according to the occasion she had them all. But He began His great work before she was born; before she could think, speak, or act, by making her holy, and thereby, while on earth, a citizen of heaven. "Tota pulchra es, Maria! " Nothing of the deformity of sin was ever hers. Thus she differs from all saints. There have been great missionaries, confessors, bishops, doctors, pastors. They have done great works, and have taken with them numberless converts or penitents to heaven. They have suffered much, and have a superabundance of merits to show. But Mary in this way resembles her Divine Son, viz., that, as He, being God, is

separate by holiness from all creatures, so she is separate from all Saints and Angels, as being "full of grace"

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Regina Angelorum", The Queen of the Angels

This great title may be fitly connected with the Maternity of Mary, that is, with the coming upon her of the Holy Ghost at Nazareth after the Angel Gabriel's annunciation to her, and with the consequent birth of our Lord at Bethlehem. She, as the Mother of our Lord, comes nearer to Him than any angel; nearer even than the Seraphim who surround Him, and cry continually, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

The two Archangels who have a special office in the Gospel are Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel - and they both of them are associated in the history of the Incarnation with Mary: Saint Gabriel, when the Holy Ghost came down upon her; and Saint Michael, when the Divine Child was born.

Saint Gabriel hailed her as "Full of grace," and as "Blessed among women," and announced to her that the Holy Ghost would come down upon her, and that she would bear a Son who would be the Son of the Highest.

Of Saint Michael's ministry to her, on the birth of that Divine Son, we learn in the Apocalypse, written by the Apostle Saint John. We know our Lord came to set up the Kingdom of Heaven among men; and hardly was He born when He was assaulted by the powers of the world who wished to destroy Him. Herod sought to take His life, but he was defeated by



Saint Joseph's carrying His Mother and Him off into Egypt. But Saint John in the Apocalypse tells us that Michael and his angels were the real guardians of Mother and Child, then and on other occasions.

First, Saint John saw in vision "a great sign in heaven" (meaning by "heaven" the Church, or Kingdom of God), "a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars"; and when she was about to be delivered of her Child there appeared "a great red dragon," that is, the evil spirit, ready "to devour her son" when He should be born. The Son was preserved by His own Divine power, but next the evil spirit persecuted her; Saint Michael, however, and his angels came to the rescue and prevailed against him.

"There was a great battle," says the sacred writer; "Michael and his Angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels; and that great dragon was cast out, the old serpent, who is called the devil." Now, as then, the Blessed Mother of God has hosts of angels who do her service; and she is their Queen.

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Speculum Justitiae", The Mirror of Justice

Here first we must consider what is meant by justice, for the word as used by the Church has not that sense which it bears in ordinary English. By "justice" is not meant the virtue of fairness, equity, uprightness in our dealings; but it is a word denoting all virtues at once, a perfect, virtuous state of soul - righteousness, or moral perfection; so that it answers very nearly to what is meant by *sanctity*. Therefore when our Lady is called the "Mirror of Justice," it is meant to say that she is the Mirror of sanctity, holiness, supernatural goodness.



Next, what is meant by calling her a mirror? A mirror is a surface which reflects, as still water, polished steel, or a looking-glass. What did Mary reflect? She reflected our Lord - but *He* is infinite *Sanctity*. She then, as far as a creature could, reflected His Divine sanctity, and therefore she is the *Mirror of Sanctity*, or, as the Litany says, of *Justice*.

Do we ask how she came to reflect His Sanctity? - it was by living with Him. We see every day how like people get to each other who live with those they love. When they live with those whom they don't love, as, for instance, the members of a family who quarrel with each other, then the longer they live together the more unlike each other they become; but when they love each other, as husband and

wife, parents and children, brothers with brothers or sisters, friends with friends, then in course of time they get surprisingly like each other. All of us perceive this; we are witnesses to it with our own eyes and ears - in the expression of their features, in their voice, in their walk, in their language, even in their handwriting, they become like each other; and so with regard to their minds, as in their opinions, their tastes, their pursuits. And again doubtless in the state of their souls, which we do not see, whether for good or for bad.

Now, consider that Mary loved her Divine Son with an unutterable love; and consider too she had Him all to herself for thirty years. Do we not see that, as she was full of grace *before* she conceived Him in her womb, she must have had a vast incomprehensible sanctity when she had lived close to God for thirty years? - a sanctity of an angelical order, reflecting back the attributes of God with a fulness and exactness of which no saint upon earth, or hermit, or holy virgin, can even remind us. Truly then she is the *Speculum Justitiae*, the *Mirror of Divine Perfection*.

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Sedes Sapientiae", the Seat of Wisdom

Mary has this title in her Litany, because the Son of God, who is also called in Scripture the Word and Wisdom of God, once dwelt in her, and then, after His birth of her, was carried in her arms and seated in her lap in His first years. Thus, being, as it were, the human throne of Him who reigns in heaven, she is called the *Seat of Wisdom*. In the poet's words:

-

His throne, thy bosom blest,
O Mother undefiled,
That Throne, if aught beneath the
skies.
Beseems the sinless Child.



But the possession of her Son lasted beyond His infancy - He was under her rule, as Saint Luke tells us, and lived with her in her house, till He went forth to preach - that is, for at least a whole thirty years. And this brings us to a reflection about her, cognate to that which was suggested to us yesterday by the title of "Mirror of Justice." For if such close and continued intimacy with her Son created in her a sanctity inconceivably great, must not also the knowledge which she gained during those many years from His conversation of present, past, and future, have been so large, and so profound, and so diversified, and so thorough, that, though she was a poor woman without human advantages, she must in her knowledge of creation, of the universe, and of history,

have excelled the greatest of philosophers, and in her theological knowledge the greatest of theologians, and in her prophetic discernment the most favoured of prophets?

What was the grand theme of conversation between her and her Son but the nature, the attributes, the providence, and the works of Almighty God? Would not our Lord be ever glorifying the Father who sent Him? Would He not unfold to her the solemn eternal decrees, and the purposes and will of God? Would He not from time to time enlighten her in all those points of doctrine which have been first discussed and then settled in the Church from the time of the Apostles till now, and all that shall be till the end, - nay, these, and far more than these? All that is obscure, all that is fragmentary in revelation, would, so far as the knowledge is possible to man, be brought out to her in clearness and simplicity by Him who is the Light of the World.

And so of the events which are to come. God spoke to the Prophets: we have His communications to them in Scripture. But He spoke to them in figure and parable. There was one, viz., Moses, to whom He vouchsafed to speak face to face. "If there be among you a prophet of the Lord," God says, "I will appear to him in a vision, and I will speak to him in a dream. But it is not so with my servant Moses. . . . For I will speak to him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord." This was the great privilege of the inspired Lawgiver of the Jews; but how much was it below that of Mary! Moses had the privilege only now and then, from time to time; but Mary for thirty continuous years saw and heard Him, being all through that time face to face with Him, and being able to ask Him any question which she wished explained, and knowing that the answers she received were from the Eternal God, who neither deceives nor can be deceived.

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Ianua Coeli", The Gate of Heaven

Mary is called the *Gate of Heaven*, because it was through her that our Lord passed from heaven to earth. The Prophet Ezechiel, prophesying of Mary, says, "the gate shall be closed, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it, since the Lord God of Israel has entered through it - and it shall be closed for the Prince, the Prince Himself shall sit in it."

Now this is fulfilled, not only in our Lord having taken flesh from her, and being her Son, but, moreover, in that she had a place in the economy of Redemption; it is fulfilled in her spirit and will, as well as in her body. Eve had a part in the fall of man, though it was Adam who was our representative, and whose sin made us sinners. It was Eve who began, and who tempted Adam. Scripture says: "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold; and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, and he did eat." It was fitting then in God's mercy that, as the woman began the *destruction* of the world, so woman should also begin its *recovery*, and that, as Eve opened the way for the fatal deed of the first Adam, so Mary should open the way for the great achievement of the second Adam, even our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to save the world by dying on the cross for it. Hence Mary is called by the holy Fathers a second and a better Eve, as having taken that first step in the salvation of mankind which Eve took in its ruin.



How, and when, did Mary take part, and the initial part, in the world's restoration? It was when the Angel Gabriel came to her to announce to her the great dignity which was to be her portion. Saint Paul bids us "present our bodies to God as a reasonable service." We must not only pray with our lips, and fast, and do outward penance, and be chaste in our bodies; but we must be obedient, and pure in our minds. And so, as regards the Blessed Virgin, it was God's will that she should undertake *willingly* and with *full understanding* to be the Mother of our Lord, and not to be a mere passive instrument whose maternity would have no merit and no reward. The higher our gifts, the heavier our duties. It was no light lot to be so intimately near to the Redeemer of men, as she experienced afterwards when she suffered with him. Therefore, weighing well the Angel's words before giving her answer to them - first she asked whether so great an office would be a forfeiture of that Virginity which she had vowed. When the Angel told her no, then, with the full consent of a full heart, full of God's love to her and her own lowliness, she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word." It was by this consent that she became the *Gate of Heaven*.

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Mater Creatoris", the Mother of the Creator

This is a title which, of all others, we should have thought it impossible for any creature to possess. At first sight we might be tempted to say that it throws into confusion our primary ideas of the Creator and the creature, the Eternal and the temporal, the Self-subsisting and the dependent; and yet on further consideration we shall see that we cannot refuse the title to Mary without denying the Divine Incarnation - that is, the great and fundamental truth of revelation, that God became man.



And this was seen from the first age of the Church. Christians were accustomed from the first to call the Blessed Virgin "The Mother of God," because they saw that it was impossible to deny her that title without denying Saint John's words, "The Word" (that is, God the Son) "was made flesh."

And in no long time it was found necessary to proclaim this truth by the voice of an Ecumenical Council of the Church. For, in consequence of the dislike which men have of a mystery, the error sprang up that our Lord was not really God, but a man, differing from us in this merely - that God dwelt in Him, as God dwells in all good men, only in a higher measure; as the Holy Spirit dwelt in Angels and Prophets, as in a sort of Temple.; or again, as our Lord now dwells in the Tabernacle in church. And then the bishops and faithful people found there was no other way of hindering this false,

bad view being taught but by declaring distinctly, and making it a point of faith, that Mary was the Mother, not of man only, but of God. And since that time the title of Mary, as *Mother of God*, has become what is called a dogma, or article of faith, in the Church.

But this leads us to a larger view of the subject. Is this title as given to Mary more wonderful than the doctrine that God, without ceasing to be God, should become man? Is it more mysterious that Mary should be Mother of God, than that God should be man? Yet the latter, as I have said, is the elementary truth of revelation, witnessed by Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles all through Scripture. And what can be more consoling and joyful than the wonderful promises which follow from this truth, that Mary is the Mother of God? - the great wonder, namely, that we become the brethren of our God; that, if we live well, and die in the grace of God, we shall all of us hereafter be taken up by our Incarnate God to that place where angels dwell; that our bodies shall be raised from the dust, and be taken to Heaven; that we shall be really united to God; that we shall be partakers of the Divine nature; that each of us, soul and body, shall be plunged into the abyss of glory which surrounds the Almighty; that we shall see Him, and share His blessedness, according to the text, "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in Heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother."

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Mater Christi", the Mother of Christ

Each of the titles of Mary has its own special meaning and drift, and may be made the subject of a distinct meditation. She is invoked by us as the *Mother of Christ*. What is the force of thus addressing her? It is to bring before us that she it is who from the first was prophesied of, and associated with the hopes and prayers of all holy men, of all true worshippers of God, of all who "looked for the redemption of Israel" in every age before that redemption came.

Our Lord was called the Christ, or the Messias, by the Jewish prophets and the Jewish people. The two words Christ and Messias mean the same. They mean in English the "Anointed." In the old time there were three great ministries or offices by means of which God spoke to His chosen people, the Israelites, or, as they were afterward called, the Jews, viz., that of Priest, that of King, and that of Prophet. Those who were chosen by God for one or other of these offices were solemnly anointed with oil - oil signifying the grace of God, which was given to them for the due performance of their high duties. But our Lord was all three, a Priest, a Prophet, and a King - a Priest, because He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins; a Prophet, because He revealed to us the Holy Law of God; and a King, because He rules over us. Thus He is the one true Christ.

It was in expectation of this great Messias that the chosen people, the Jews, or Israelites, or Hebrews (for these are



different names for the same people), looked out from age to age. He was to come to set all things right. And next to this great question which occupied their minds, namely, *When* was He to come, was the question, *Who* was to be His Mother? It had been told them from the first, not that He should come from heaven, but that He should be born of a Woman. At the time of the fall of Adam, God had said that the *seed of the Woman* should bruise the Serpent's head. Who, then, was to be that Woman thus significantly pointed out to the fallen race of Adam? At the end of many centuries, it was further revealed to the Jews that the great Messias, or Christ, the seed of the Woman, should be born of their race, and of one particular tribe of the twelve tribes into which that race was divided. From that time every woman of that tribe hoped to have the great privilege of herself being the Mother of the Messias, or Christ; for it stood to reason, since He was so great, the Mother must be great, and good, and blessed too. Hence it was, among other reasons, that they thought so highly of the marriage state, because, not knowing the mystery of the miraculous conception of the Christ when He was actually to come, they thought that the marriage rite was the ordinance necessary for His coming.

Hence it was, if Mary had been as other women, she would have longed for marriage, as opening on her the prospect of bearing the great King. But she was too humble and too pure for such thoughts. She had been inspired to choose that better way of serving God which had not been made known to the Jews - the state of Virginity. She preferred to be His Spouse to being His Mother. Accordingly, when the Angel Gabriel announced to her her high destiny, she shrank from it till she was assured that it would not oblige her to revoke her purpose of a virgin life devoted to her God.

Thus was it that she became the Mother of the Christ, not in that way which pious women for so many ages had expected Him, but, declining the grace of such maternity, she gained it by means of a higher graces And this is the full meaning of Saint Elizabeth's words, when the Blessed Virgin came to Visit her; which we use in the Hail Mary: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." And therefore it is that in the Devotion called the "*Crown of Twelve Stars*" we give praise to God the Holy Ghost, through whom she was *both* Virgin *and* Mother.

On the Annunciation - Mary is the "Mater Salvatoris", The Mother of the Saviour

Here again we must understand what is meant by calling our Lord a Saviour in order to understand why it is used to form one of the titles given to Mary in her Litany.

The special name by which our Lord was known before His coming was, as we found yesterday, that of Messias, or Christ. Thus He was known to the Jews. But when He actually showed Himself on earth, He was known by three new titles, the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the Saviour; the first expressive of His Divine Nature, the second of His Human, the third of His Personal Office. Thus the Angel who appeared to Mary called Him the Son of God; the angel who appeared to Joseph called Him Jesus, which means in English, Saviour; and so the Angels, too, called Him a Saviour when they appeared to the shepherds. But He Himself specially calls Himself the Son of Man.

Not Angels only call Him Saviour, but those two greatest of the Apostles, Saint Peter and Saint Paul, in their first preachings. Saint Peter says He is "a Prince and a Saviour," and Saint Paul says, "a Saviour, Jesus." And both Angels and Apostles tell us why He is so called - because He has rescued us from the power of the evil spirit, and from the guilt and misery of our sins. Thus the Angel says to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from



their sins;" and Saint Peter, "God has exalted Him to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." And He says Himself, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost"

Now let us consider how this affects our thoughts of Mary. To rescue slaves from the power of the Enemy implies a conflict. Our Lord, because He was a Saviour, was a warrior. He could not deliver the captives without a fight, nor without personal suffering. Now, who are they who especially hate wars? A heathen poet answers. "Wars," he says, "are hated by Mothers." Mothers are just those who especially suffer in a war. They may glory in the honour gained by their children; but still such glorying does not wipe out one particle of the long pain, the anxiety, the suspense, the desolation, and the anguish which the mother of a soldier feels. So it was with Mary. For thirty years she was blessed with the continual presence of her Son - nay, she had Him in subjection. But the time came when that war called for Him for which He had come upon earth. Certainly He came, not simply to be the Son of Mary, but to be the Saviour of Man, and therefore at length He parted from her. She knew then what it was to be the mother of a soldier. He left her side; she saw Him no longer; she tried in vain to get near Him. He had for years lived in her embrace, and after that, at least in her dwelling - but now, in His own words, "The Son of Man had not where to lay His head." And then, when years had run out, she heard of His arrest, His mock trial, and His passion. At last she got near Him - when and where? - on the way to Calvary: and when He had been lifted upon the Cross. And at length she held Him again in her arms: yes - when He was dead. True, He rose from the dead; but still she did not thereby gain Him, for He ascended on high, and she did not at once follow Him. No, she remained on earth many years - in the care, indeed, of His dearest Apostle, Saint John. But what was even the holiest of men

compared with her own Son, and Him the Son of God? O Holy Mary, Mother of our Saviour, in this meditation we have now suddenly passed from the Joyful Mysteries to the Sorrowful, from Gabriel's Annunciation to thee, to the Seven Dolours. That, then, will be the next series of Meditations which we make about thee.

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Regina Martyrum", the Queen of Martyrs

Why is she so called? - she who never had any blow, or wound, or other injury to her consecrated person. How can she be exalted over those whose bodies suffered the most ruthless violences and the keenest torments for our Lord's sake? She is, indeed, Queen of all Saints, of those who "walk with Christ in white, for they are worthy;" but how of those "who were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held?"

To answer this question, it must be recollected that the pains of the soul may be as fierce as those of the body. Bad men who are now in hell, and the elect of God who are in purgatory, are suffering only in their souls, for their bodies are still in the dust; yet how severe is that suffering! And perhaps most people who have lived long can bear witness in their own persons to a sharpness of distress which was like a sword cutting them, to a weight and force of sorrow which seemed to throw them down, though bodily pain there was none.

What an overwhelming horror it must have been for the Blessed Mary to witness the Passion and the Crucifixion of her Son! Her anguish was, as Holy Simeon had announced to her, at the time of that Son's Presentation in the Temple, a sword piercing her soul. If our Lord Himself could not bear the prospect of what was before Him, and was covered in the



thought of it with a bloody sweat, His soul thus acting upon His body, does not this show how great mental pain can be? and would it have been wonderful though Mary's head and heart had given way as she stood under His Cross?

Thus is she most truly the Queen of *Martyrs*.

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Vas Insigne Devotionis", The Most Devout Virgin

To be *devout* is to be devoted. We know what is meant by a devoted wife or daughter. It is one whose thoughts centre in the person so deeply loved, so tenderly cherished. She follows him about with her eyes; she is ever seeking some means of serving him; and, if her services are very small in their character, that only shows how intimate they are, and how incessant. And especially if the object of her love be weak, or in pain, or near to die, still more intensely does she live in his life, and know nothing but him.



This intense devotion towards our Lord, forgetting self in love for Him, is instanced in Saint Paul, who says, "I know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And again, "I live, [yet] now not I, but Christ liveth in me; and [the life] that I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself for me."

But great as was Saint Paul's devotion to our Lord, much greater was that of the Blessed Virgin; because she was His Mother, and because she had Him and all His sufferings actually before her eyes, and because she had the long intimacy of thirty years with Him, and because she was from her special sanctity so ineffably near to Him in spirit. When, then, He was mocked, bruised, scourged, and nailed to the Cross, she felt as keenly as if every indignity and torture inflicted on Him was struck at herself. She could have cried out in agony at every pang of His.

This is called her *compassion*, or her suffering with her Son, and it arose from this that she was the "Vas insigne *devotionis*."

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Vas Honorabile", the Vessel of Honour

Saint Paul calls elect souls vessels of honour: of honour, because they are elect or chosen; and vessels, because, through the love of God, they are filled with God's heavenly and holy grace. How much more then is Mary a vessel of honour by reason of her having within her, not only the grace of God, but the very Son of God, formed as regards His flesh and blood out of her!

But this title "*honorabile*", as applied to Mary, admits of a further and special meaning. She was a martyr without the rude dishonour which accompanied the sufferings of martyrs. The martyrs were seized, haled about, thrust into prison with the vilest criminals, and assailed with the most blasphemous words and foulest speeches which Satan could inspire. Nay, such was the unutterable trial also of the holy women, young ladies, the spouses of Christ, whom the heathen seized, tortured, and put to death. Above all, our Lord Himself, whose sanctity was greater than any created excellence or vessel of grace - even He, as we know well, was buffeted, stripped, scourged, mocked, dragged about, and then stretched, nailed, lifted up on a high cross, to the gaze of a brutal multitude.

But He, who bore the sinner's shame for sinners, spared His Mother, who was sinless, this supreme indignity. Not in the body, but in the soul, she suffered. True, in His Agony she was agonized; in His Passion she suffered a fellow-passion;



she was crucified with Him; the spear that pierced His breast pierced through her spirit. Yet there were no visible signs of this intimate martyrdom; she stood up, still, collected, motionless, solitary, under the Cross of her Son, surrounded by Angels, and shrouded in her virginal sanctity from the notice of all who were taking part in His Crucifixion.

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Vas Spirituale", the Spiritual Vessel

To be *spiritual* is to live in the world of spirits - as Saint Paul says, "Our conversation is in Heaven." To be *spiritually-minded* is to see by faith all those good and holy beings who actually surround us, though we see them not with our bodily eyes; to see them by faith as vividly as we see the things of earth - the green country, the blue sky, and the brilliant sunshine. Hence it is that, when saintly souls are favoured with heavenly visions, these visions are but the extraordinary continuations and the crown, by a divine intuition, of objects which, by the ordinary operation of grace, are ever before their minds.



These visions consoled and strengthened the Blessed Virgin in all her sorrows. The Angels who were around her understood her, and she understood them, with a directness which is not to be expected in their intercourse with us who have inherited from Adam the taint of sin. Doubtless; but still let us never forget that as she in her sorrows was comforted by Angels, so it is our privilege in the many trials of life to be comforted, in our degree, by the same heavenly messengers of the Most High; nay, by Almighty God Himself, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, who has taken on Himself the office of being our Paraclete, or Present Help.

Let all those who are in trouble take this comfort to themselves, if they are trying to lead a spiritual life. If they

call on God, He will answer them. Though they have no earthly friend, they have Him, who, as He felt for His Mother when He was on the Cross, now that He is in His glory feels for the lowest and feeblest of His people.

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Consolatrix Affictorum", the Consoler of the Afflicted

Saint Paul says that his Lord comforted him in all his tribulation, that he also might be able to comfort them who are in distress, by the encouragement which he received from God. This is the secret of true consolation: those are able to comfort others who in their own case, have been much tried, and have felt the need of consolation, and have received it. So of our Lord Himself it is said: "In that He Himself hath suffered and been tempted, He is able to succour those also that are tempted."



And this too is why the Blessed Virgin is the comforter of the afflicted. We all know how special a mother's consolation is, and we are allowed to call Mary our Mother from the time that our Lord from the Cross established the relation of mother and son between her and Saint John. And she especially can console us because she suffered more than mothers in general. Women, at least delicate women, are commonly shielded from rude experience of the highways of the world; but she, after our Lord's Ascension, was sent out into foreign lands almost as the Apostles were, a sheep among wolves. In spite of all Saint John's care of her, which was as great as was Saint Joseph's in her younger days, she, more than all the saints of God, was a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, in proportion to her greater love of Him who had been on earth, and had gone away. As, when our Lord was an Infant, she had to flee across the desert to the heathen

Egypt, so, when He had ascended on high, she had to go on shipboard to the heathen Ephesus, where she lived and died.

O ye who are in the midst of rude neighbours or scoffing companions, or of wicked acquaintance, or of spiteful enemies, and are helpless, invoke the aid of Mary by the memory of her own sufferings among the heathen Greeks and the heathen Egyptians.

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Virgo Prudentissima", the Most Prudent Virgin

It may not appear at first sight how the virtue of prudence is connected with the trials and sorrows of our Lady's life; yet there is a point of view from which we are reminded of her prudence by those trials. It must be recollected that she is not only the great instance of the contemplative life, but also of the practical; and the practical life is at once a life of penance and of prudence, if it is to be well discharged. Now Mary was as full of external work and hard service as any Sister of Charity at this day. Of course her duties varied according to the seasons of her life, as a young maiden, as a wife, as a mother, and as a widow; but still her life was full of duties day by day and hour by hour. As a stranger in Egypt, she had duties towards the poor heathen among whom she was thrown. As a dweller in Nazareth, she had her duties towards her kinsfolk and neighbours. She had her duties, though unrecorded, during those years in which our Lord was preaching and proclaiming His Kingdom. After He had left this earth, she had her duties towards the Apostles, and especially towards the Evangelists. She had duties towards the Martyrs, and to the Confessors in prison; to the sick, to the ignorant, and to the poor. Afterwards, she had to seek with Saint John another and a heathen country, where her happy death took place. But before that death, how much must she have suffered in her life amid an idolatrous



population! Doubtless the Angels screened her eyes from the worst crimes there committed. Still, she was full of duties there - and in consequence she was full of merit. All her acts were perfect, all were the best that could be done. Now, always to be awake, guarded, fervent, so as to be able to act not only without sin, but in the best possible way, in the varying circumstances of each day, denotes a life of untiring mindfulness. But of such a life, Prudence is the presiding virtue. It is, then, through the pains and sorrows of her earthly pilgrimage that we are able to invoke her as the *Virgo prudentissima*.

Our Lady's Dolours - Mary is the "Turris Eburnea", the Ivory Tower

A tower is a fabric which rises higher and more conspicuous than other objects in its neighbourhood. Thus, when we say a man "towers" over his fellows, we mean to signify that they look small in comparison of him.

This quality of greatness is instanced in the Blessed Virgin. Though she suffered more keen and intimate anguish at our Lord's Passion and Crucifixion than any of the Apostles by reason of her being His Mother, yet consider how much more noble she was amid her deep distress than they were. When our Lord underwent His agony, they slept for sorrow. They could not wrestle with their deep disappointment and despondency; they could not master it; it confused, numbed, and overcame their senses. And soon after, when Saint Peter was asked by bystanders whether he was not one of our Lord's disciples, he denied it.

Nor was he alone in this cowardice. The Apostles, one and all, forsook our Lord and fled, though Saint John returned. Nay, still further, they even lost faith in Him, and thought all the great expectations which He had raised in them had ended in a failure. How different this even from the brave conduct of Saint Mary Magdalen! and still more from that of the Virgin Mother! It is expressly noted of her that she *stood* by the Cross. She did not grovel in the dust, but *stood*



upright to receive the blows, the stabs, which the long Passion of her Son inflicted upon her every moment.

In this magnanimity and generosity in suffering she is, as compared with the Apostles, fitly imaged as a *Tower*. But towers, it may be said, are huge, rough, heavy, obtrusive, graceless structures, for the purposes of war, not of peace; with nothing of the beauty, refinement, and finish which are conspicuous in Mary. It is true: therefore she is called the Tower of *Ivory*, to suggest to us, by the brightness, purity, and exquisiteness of that material, how transcendent is the loveliness and the gentleness of the Mother of God.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Sancta Dei Genitrix", the Holy Mother of God

As soon as we apprehend by faith the great fundamental truth that Mary is the Mother of God, other wonderful truths follow in its train; and one of these is that she was exempt from the ordinary lot of mortals, which is not only to die, but to become earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Die she must, and die she did, as her Divine Son died, for He was man; but various reasons have approved themselves to holy writers, why, although her body was for a while separated from her soul and consigned to the tomb, yet it did not remain there, but was speedily united to her soul again, and raised by our Lord to a new and eternal life of heavenly glory.

And the most obvious reason for so concluding is this - that other servants of God have been raised from the grave by the power of God, and it is not to be supposed that our Lord would have granted any such privilege to anyone else without also granting it to His own Mother.

We are told by Saint Matthew, that after our Lord's death upon the Cross "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints that had slept" - that is, slept the sleep of death, "arose, and coming out of the tombs after His Resurrection, came into the Holy City, and appeared to many." Saint Matthew says, "many bodies of the Saints" -



that is, the holy Prophets, Priests, and Kings of former times - rose again in anticipation of the last day.

Can we suppose that Abraham, or David, or Isaias, or Ezechias, should have been thus favoured, and not God's own Mother? Had she not a claim on the love of her Son to have what any others had? Was she not nearer to Him than the greatest of the Saints before her? And is it conceivable that the law of the grave should admit of relaxation in their case, and not in hers? Therefore we confidently say that our Lord, having preserved her from sin and the consequences of sin by His Passion, lost no time in pouring out the full merits of that Passion upon her body as well as her soul.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Mater Intemerata", the Sinless Mother

Another consideration which has led devout minds to believe in the Assumption of our Lady into heaven after her death, without waiting for the general resurrection at the last day, is furnished by the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception.

By her Immaculate Conception is meant, that not only did she never commit any sin whatever, even venial, in thought, word, or deed, but further than this, that the guilt of Adam, or what is called original sin, never was her guilt, as it is the guilt attaching to all other descendants of Adam.

By her Assumption is meant that not only her soul, but her body also, was taken up to heaven upon her death, so that there was no long period of her sleeping in the grave, as is the case with others, even great Saints, who wait for the last day for the resurrection of their bodies.

One reason for believing in our Lady's Assumption is that her Divine Son loved her too much to let her body remain in the grave. A second reason - that now before us - is this, that she was not only dear to the Lord as a mother is dear to a son, but also that she was so transcendently holy, so full, so overflowing with grace. Adam and Eve were created upright and sinless, and had a large measure of God's grace bestowed upon them; and, in consequence, their bodies



would never have crumbled into dust, had they not sinned; upon which it was said to them, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." If Eve, the beautiful daughter of God, never would have become dust and ashes unless she had sinned, shall we not say that Mary, having never sinned, retained the gift which Eve by sinning lost? What had Mary done to forfeit the privilege given to our first parents in the beginning? Was her comeliness to be turned into corruption, and her fine gold to become dim, without reason assigned? Impossible. Therefore we believe that, though she died for a short hour, as did our Lord Himself, yet, like Him, and by His Almighty power, she was raised again from the grave.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Rosa Mystica", the Mystical Rose

Mary is the most beautiful flower that ever was seen in the spiritual world. It is by the power of God's grace that from this barren and desolate earth there have ever sprung up at all flowers of holiness and glory. And Mary is the Queen of them. She is the Queen of spiritual flowers; and therefore she is called the Rose, for the rose is fitly called of all flowers the most beautiful.



But moreover, she is the *Mystical*, or *hidden* Rose; for mystical means hidden.

How is she now "hidden" from us more than are other saints? What means this singular appellation, which we apply to her specially? The answer to this question introduces us to a third reason for believing in the reunion of her sacred body to her soul, and its assumption into heaven soon after her death, instead of its lingering in the grave until the General Resurrection at the last day.

It is this: if her body was not taken into heaven, where is it? how comes it that it is hidden from us? why do we not hear of her tomb as being here or there? why are not pilgrimages made to it? why are not relics producible of her, as of the saints in general? Is it not even a natural instinct which makes us reverent towards the places where our dead are buried? We bury our great men honourably. Saint Peter speaks of the sepulchre of David as known in his day, though he had died many hundred years before. When our Lord's body was taken down from the Cross, He was placed

in an honourable tomb. Such too had been the honour already paid to Saint John Baptist, his tomb being spoken of by Saint Mark as generally known. Christians from the earliest times went from other countries to Jerusalem to see the holy places. And, when the time of persecution was over, they paid still more attention to the bodies of the Saints, as of Saint Stephen, Saint Mark, Saint Barnabas, Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and other Apostles and Martyrs. These were transported to great cities, and portions of them sent to this place or that. Thus, from the first to this day it has been a great feature and characteristic of the Church to be most tender and reverent towards the bodies of the Saints. Now, if there was anyone who more than all would be preciously taken care of, it would be our Lady. Why then do we hear nothing of the Blessed Virgin's body and its separate relics? Why is she thus the hidden Rose? Is it conceivable that they who had been so reverent and careful of the bodies of the Saints and Martyrs should neglect her - her who was the Queen of Martyrs and the Queen of Saints, who was the very Mother of our Lord? It is impossible. Why then is she thus the *hidden* Rose? Plainly because that sacred body is in heaven, not on earth.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Turris Davidica", the Tower of David

A tower in its simplest idea is a fabric for defense against enemies. David, King of Israel, built for this purpose a notable tower; and as he is a figure or type of our Lord, so is his tower a figure denoting our Lord's Virgin Mother.

She is called the *Tower of David* because she had so signally fulfilled the office of defending her Divine Son from the assaults of His foes. It is customary with those who are not Catholics to fancy that the honours we pay to her interfere with the supreme worship which we pay to Him; that in Catholic teaching she eclipses Him. But this is the very reverse of the truth.

For if Mary's glory is so very great, how cannot His be greater still who is the Lord and God of Mary? He is infinitely above His Mother; and all that grace which filled her is but the overflowings and superfluities of His incomprehensible Sanctity. And history teaches us the same lesson. Look at the Protestant countries which threw off all devotion to her three centuries ago, under the notion that to put her from their thoughts would be exalting the praises of her Son. Has that consequence really followed from their profane conduct towards her? Just the reverse - the countries, Germany, Switzerland, England, which so acted, have in great measure ceased to worship Him, and have given up their belief in His Divinity; while the Catholic Church, wherever she is to be found, adores Christ as true God and true Man, as firmly as



ever she did; and strange indeed would it be, if it ever happened otherwise. Thus Mary is the "Tower of David."

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Virgo Potens", the Powerful Virgin

This great universe, which we see by day and by night, or what is called the natural world, is ruled by fixed laws, which the Creator has imposed upon it, and by those wonderful laws is made secure against any substantial injury or loss. One portion of it may conflict with another, and there may be changes in it internally; but, viewed as a whole, it is adapted to stand for ever. Hence the Psalmist says, "He has established the world, which shall not be moved."

Such is the world of nature; but there is another and still more wonderful world. There is a power which avails to alter and subdue this visible world, and to suspend and counteract its laws; that is, the world of Angels and Saints, of Holy Church and her children; and the weapon by which they master its laws is the power of prayer.

By prayer all this may be done, which naturally is impossible. Noe prayed, and God said that there never again should be a flood to drown the race of man. Moses prayed, and ten grievous plagues fell upon the land of Egypt. Josue prayed, and the sun stood still. Samuel prayed, and thunder and rain came in wheat-harvest. Elias prayed, and brought down fire from heaven. Eliseus prayed, and the dead came to life. Ezechias prayed and the vast army of the Assyrians was smitten and perished.



This is why the Blessed Virgin is called *Powerful* - nay, sometimes, *All-powerful*, because she has, more than anyone else, more than all Angels and Saints, this great, prevailing gift of prayer. No one has access to the Almighty as His Mother has; none has merit such as hers. Her Son will deny her nothing that she asks; and herein lies her power. While she defends the Church, neither height nor depth, neither men nor evil spirits, neither great monarchs, nor craft of man, nor popular violence, can avail to harm us; for human life is short, but Mary reigns above, a Queen for ever.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Auxilium Christianorum", the Help of Christians

Our glorious Queen, since her Assumption on high, has been the minister of numberless services to the elect people of God upon earth, and to His Holy Church. This title of "Help of Christians" relates to those services of which the Divine Office, while recording and referring to the occasion on which it was given her, recounts five, connecting them more or less with the Rosary.

The first was on the first institution of the Devotion of the Rosary by Saint Dominic, when, with the aid of the Blessed Virgin, he succeeded in arresting and overthrowing the formidable heresy of the Albigenses in the South of France.

The second was the great victory gained by the Christian fleet over the powerful Turkish Sultan, in answer to the intercession of Pope Saint Pius V, and the prayers of the Associations of the Rosary all over the Christian world; in lasting memory of which wonderful mercy Pope Pius introduced her title "*Auxilium Christianorum*" into her Litany; and Pope Gregory XIII, who followed him, dedicated the first Sunday in October, the day of the victory, to Our Lady of the Rosary.

The third was, in the words of the Divine Office, "the glorious victory won at Vienna, under the guardianship of the



Blessed Virgin, over the most savage Sultan of the Turks, who was trampling on the necks of the Christians; in perpetual memory of which benefit Pope Innocent XI dedicated the Sunday in the Octave of her Nativity as the feast of her *august Name*."

The fourth instance of her aid was the victory over the innumerable force of the same Turks in Hungary on the Feast of Saint Mary ad Nives, in answer to the solemn supplication of the Confraternities of the Rosary; on occasion of which Popes Clement XI and Benedict XIII gave fresh honour and privilege to the Devotion of the Rosary.

And the fifth was her restoration of the Pope's temporal power, at the beginning of this century, after Napoleon the First, Emperor of the French, had taken it from the Holy See; on which occasion Pope Pius VII set apart 24 May, the day of this mercy, as the Feast of the *Help of Christians*, for a perpetual thanksgiving.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Virgo Fidelis", the Most Faithful Virgin

This is one of the titles of the Blessed Virgin, which is especially hers from the time of her Assumption and glorious Coronation at the right hand of her Divine Son. How it belongs to her will be plain by considering some of those other instances in which faithfulness is spoken of in Holy Scripture.

The word *faithfulness* means loyalty to a superior, or exactness in fulfilling an engagement. In the latter sense it is applied even to Almighty God Himself, who, in His great love for us, has vouchsafed to limit His own power in action by His word of promise and His covenant with His creatures. He has given His word that, if we will take Him for our portion and put ourselves into His hands, He will guide us through all trials and temptations, and bring us safe to heaven. And to encourage and inspirit us, He reminds us, in various passages of Scripture that He is the *faithful* God, the *faithful* Creator.

And so, His true saints and servants have the special title of "Faithful," as being true to Him as He is to them; as being simply obedient to his will, zealous for His honour, observant of the sacred interests which He has committed to their keeping. Thus Abraham is called the Faithful; Moses is declared to be faithful in all his house; David, on this



account, is called the "man after God's own heart"; Saint Paul returns thanks that "God accounted him faithful"; and, at the last day, God will say to all those who have well employed their talents, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Mary, in like manner, is pre-eminently faithful to her Lord and Son. Let no one for an instant suppose that she is not supremely zealous for His honour, or, as those who are not Catholics fancy, that to exalt her is to be unfaithful to Him. Her true servants are still more truly His. Well as she rewards her friends, she would deem him no friend, but a traitor, who preferred her to Him. As He is zealous for her honour, so is she for His. He is the Fount of grace, and all her gifts are from His goodness. O Mary, teach us ever to worship thy Son as the One Creator, and to be devout to thee as the most highly favoured of creatures.

On the Assumption - Mary is the "Stella Matutina", the Morning Star - After the Day Night, but Always Heralding the Sun

What is the nearest approach in the way of symbols, in this world of sight and sense, to represent to us the glories of that higher world which is beyond our bodily perceptions? What are the truest tokens and promises here, poor though they may be, of what one day we hope to see hereafter, as being beautiful and rare? Whatever they maybe, surely the Blessed Mother of God may claim them as her own. And so it is; two of them are ascribed to her as her titles, in her Litany - the stars above, and flowers below. She is at once the *Rosa Mystica* and the *Stella Matutina*.

And of these two, both of them well suited to her, the Morning Star becomes her best, and that for three reasons.

First, the rose belongs to this earth, but the star is placed in high heaven. Mary now has no part in this nether world. No change, no violence from fire, water, earth, or air, affects the stars above; and they show themselves, ever bright and marvelous, in all regions of this globe, and to all the tribes of men.

And next, the rose has but a short life; its decay is as sure as it was graceful and fragrant in its noon. But Mary, like the stars, abides for ever, as lustrous now as she was on the day



of her Assumption; as pure and perfect, when her Son comes in judgment, as she is now.

Lastly, it is Mary's prerogative to be the *Morning Star*, which heralds in the sun. She does not shine for herself, or from herself, but she is the reflection of her and our Redeemer, and she glorifies *Him*. When she appears in the darkness, we know that He is close at hand. He is Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Behold He comes quickly, and His reward is with Him, to render to everyone according to his works. "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

About This E-Book

The text of this e-book is taken from the book Meditations and Devotions of the late Cardinal Newman, copyright 1893; the version used comes from the 1916 edition.

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